

ENVIRONMENT REPORT

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3-Sisters Bridge Lauded by State

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An official report of the Virginia Department of Highways gives a glowing forecast of the environmental impact of the Three Sisters Bridge, saying it is unique in the fact that it is compatible with the parkway surroundings and enhances man's environment."

The bridge and its access road will also "help" the environment along Lee Highway in the nearby Rosslyn-Key Bridge area of Arlington, the report said, "by reducing noise, air pollution and traffic congestion."

The report went unnoticed when it was filed last May with the Council on Environmental Quality here. A copy of the report was made available yesterday.

It was filed too late to figure in the legal battle that has held up construction of the controversial bridge for over a year. The bridge is to span the Potomac River just above Georgetown.

Issue at Stake

But it deals with an issue — the environmental impact of the bridge — which has played an important role in the court fight over the bridge. Opponents claim it will damage parkland along the river and increase air and noise pollution.

In an Oct. 13 ruling that will postpone construction of the bridge for months, the U.S. Court of Appeals said that secretary of Transportation has that Three Sisters won't create environmental hazards, and it ordered him to do so.

The Virginia report was filed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The District government is also required to file an "environmental impact statement," but hasn't so far.

While drawing traffic away from Lee Highway and thus benefiting its environment, the bridge and its access road — known together as I-266 — will have "practically no detrimental effect along the proposed route," the report said.

Acreage Plans Cited

It noted that I-266 will use 31.6 acres of the existing Spout Run Parkway, but it said that this acreage will be replaced elsewhere. "Also the actual construction will only disturb a small portion of the 31.6 acres with the majority of the existing landscaping left undisturbed," it said.

"Moreover, the proposed system of trails for hiking and biking is entirely compatible with, and will provide access to, the largely undisturbed parklands. Urban residents will be able to enjoy nature."

"... This route is unique in the fact that it is compatible with the parkway surroundings and enhances man's environment with the multiple use of the right of way by providing trails and retaining open spaces."

Opponents at the bridge dispute the Virginia report on almost every point. In particular, they contend that pollution will indeed be increased if the bridge is built and they say that most of the 31.6 acres will be paved over, not preserved as parkland.

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